



**Department of Justice  
U.S. Attorney's Office  
Southern District of Texas**

**Donald J. DeGabrielle, Jr. • United States Attorney**

---

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 20, 2006

[WWW.USDOJ.GOV/USAO/TXS](http://WWW.USDOJ.GOV/USAO/TXS)

JOHN YEMBRICK

PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE

(713) 567-9388

**FORMER OFFICE MANAGER FOR LOCAL DOCTOR  
SENTENCED TO 7 YEARS FOR DEFRAUDING MEDICARE**

HOUSTON, TX – Etta Mae Williams, 47, was sentenced to seven years in federal prison, without parole, for her part in a conspiracy to defraud Medicare of \$30 million. Williams, the office manager for Dr. Callie Hall Herpin, pleaded guilty in April 2005. As part of her sentence, Williams was ordered to pay in excess of \$12 million in restitution to the Medicare program. Williams also was ordered to forfeit to the United States over \$1.8 million. Herpin is scheduled to be sentenced on April 26, 2006.

Williams and Herpin together “sold” certificates of medical necessity (CMN) and prescriptions for motorized wheelchairs and other durable medical equipment (DME) to certain marketers and DME suppliers for approximately \$200 cash. Williams and Herpin were involved in the so-called “wheelchair scam” that plagued the Houston area in 2002-2003. Dr. Herpin and Williams wrote no less than 920 fraudulent motorized wheelchair CMNs and prescriptions and received no less than \$184,000 in cash proceeds in return. Herpin admitted she did not examine all of the patients to determine their eligibility for a motorized wheelchair and most, if not all of her “patients,” were not eligible. In many instances, the marketers brought copies of the Medicare beneficiaries’ driver’s license and Medicare card to Williams and Herpin who used the information to produce the fraudulent CMNs. Various DME suppliers used the fraudulent CMNs generated by Williams and Herpin to bill Medicare in excess of \$30 million.

Williams was also sentenced for her involvement in a second conspiracy with Dr. Herpin, this time to illegally distribute hydrocodone products and codeine cough syrup, both controlled substances. Herpin and Williams “sold” prescriptions for controlled substances to individuals for cash. The prescriptions were not written in the normal course of Dr. Herpin’s medical practice nor medically necessary. Prescriptions for controlled substances, including hydrocodone and promethazine with codeine (known as “syrup” on the street), were written by the hundreds and sold to certain individuals and street dealers. Dr. Herpin pre-signed large numbers of controlled substance scrips in blank which Etta Williams sold when Herpin was out of the office. Dr. Herpin’s routine prescription was for 100 tabs of hydrocodone and one pint of syrup. Most prescriptions also allowed multiple refills. Herpin’s price for a prescription was determined by the number of drugs and number of refills requested. Several individuals, including Etta Williams, purchased multiple scrips in fabricated names. Williams and Herpin would sell as many as 200 scrips to one drug dealer at one time. Williams and others, including co-defendant Karen Williams, compiled a list of fictitious patient information, such as addresses,

telephone numbers, and dates of birth, to mirror the illegal scrips. The purchasers would take the fraudulent scrips and the list to willing pharmacists, including the co-defendants in this case, who filled them for cash. Herpin has admitted there was no legitimate medical reason for the prescriptions. During the course of the charged conspiracy, the co-defendant pharmacists dispensed in excess of 1.7 million tabs of hydrocodone and 2,500 gallons of promethazine with codeine based on prescriptions written by Dr. Herpin and/or under her DEA number. Herpin admitted that she and Etta Williams together wrote no less than 17,086 prescriptions for controlled substances and received no less than \$1,700,860 in cash proceeds.

The prosecution of Williams was a result of a joint investigation conducted by agents of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General (HHS/OIG), the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation (IRS/CI). This case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Al Balboni.

# # #